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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KUWAIT 000675

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SUBJECT: AA/S FELTMAN MEETING WITH AMIRI ADVISOR REVIEWS
CHAPTER VII ISSUES, TOPICS FOR AMIR-POTUS MEETING

Classified By: A/DCM Pete O'Donohue for reasons 1.4 b and d

¶1. (C) Summary: AA/S Feltman reviewed with Amiri Advisor Ambassador Mohammed Abulhassan on June 30 the state of play on the Kuwait - Iraq bilateral relationship and GOK expectations for an August 3 Amir - POTUS meeting in Washington. Abulhassan made clear that the Amir's (and the GOK's) highest priority is obtaining overt Iraqi acceptance of the UNSCR-designated common border; removing Iraqi farmers from Kuwaiti soil and moving ahead on boundary pillar maintenance are the essential first steps that will open the door for discussion on other issues. In addition to Chapter VII, the Amir will want to raise with POTUS concerns over Iran, the status of Kuwaiti GTMO detainees, economic reform and delays in visa issuance. AA/S also met with Prime Minister Shaykh Nasser Al-Jaber Al Sabah (Septel). End Summary.

GOK Needs Tangible Evidence of Iraqi Commitment to Border

¶2. (C) During a June 30 call by AA/S Feltman on Amiri Advisor Ambassador Mohammed Abulhassan, Abulhassan made clear that Iraq's effort to get out from under Chapter VII sanctions remains a priority concern for the GOK and will -- unless the issue is resolved in the interim -- be at the top of Amir Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al Sabah's agenda when he meets with the President in Washington on August 3. Abulhassan noted that the GOK hopes that the UN Security Council will deal effectively with the Kuwait - Iraq border issue in July by reaffirming UNSCR 833, but if not, the GOK will continue to press for action. For the GOK, two essential steps needed to demonstrate Iraqi acceptance of the land border as stipulated in 833 are the removal of some 200 Iraqi farm families from Kuwaiti territory (for which purpose the GOK has credited a UN escrow account) and to facilitate the maintenance of several boundary pillars in that same area. Abulhassan said the GOK and GOI have several times discussed dates for a visit by teams to maintain the pillars, but the GOI has backed off each time; a visit by a maintenance team is now scheduled for October. Abulhassan added that the GOK perennially receives encouraging signals from Iraqi FM Zebari, but then PM Maliki halts progress.

¶3. (C) In response, AA/S Feltman noted that the USG, while following the UN lead on resolving outstanding Chapter VII issues, remains fully committed to the land borders as designated by 833 and will contemplate no re-opening of the issue. The USG, he noted, understands Kuwaiti sensitivities about this issue given the difficult bilateral history and is, therefore, pressing the Iraqis to take tangible steps to demonstrate their acceptance of this reality. From the USG point of view, Feltman said, the issue is not about PM Maliki or any other political figure; it's about obtaining a clear commitment to the inviolability of the border as defined by ¶833. In its diplomacy, he added, the USG is trying to strike

a delicate balance between its unshakeable support for the inviolability of the border and its desire not to awaken populist elements in Iraq, who are likely to become ever more obstructionist as elections approach. For this reason, the USG is working closely with the UN and letting the UN take the public lead on the issue.

14. (C) In response to Abulhassan's query about the "tangible steps" the USG might have under consideration, AA/S Feltman noted that UN Special Representative Staffan de Mistura had discussed proposing, in exchange for overt Iraqi commitment to 833, a reduction in the percentage of Iraq's yearly oil revenues that must be directed towards Kuwaiti compensation payments, from 5 percent to 2.5 percent or even lower. Feltman noted that, if accepted, such a step might allow the Iraqis to feel that they are no longer being punished for the sins of Saddam Hussein. Ambassador underscored the need for Kuwait to look at its long-term interests which were to re-build a relationship with Iraq in which each side recognized the other was a victim of Saddam; Iraq should be re-integrated into the region "as a bulwark rather than as a bully." While acknowledging the occasionally provocative statements of some Iraqi officials and MPs, Ambassador urged the GOK to recognize that Iraq has suffered greatly as a society and to be "gracious" during this period to move the relationship forward. Feltman delicately noted that de Mistura's proposals could, potentially, help move Iraq and Kuwait beyond the present impasse in which they find themselves.

15. (C) Ambassador Abulhassan acknowledged his interlocutors' points, but noted that the injured feelings are not all on

KUWAIT 00000675 002 OF 002

the Iraqi side; the GOK also has to take into consideration the sensitivities of the Kuwaiti public and parliament, who clearly recall past Iraqi deprivations. The GOK, he noted, has long been more than forthcoming in its efforts to put relations with Iraq back on a normal footing. The GOK "generously" agreed in the past to drop the percentage of Iraqi oil revenue compensation payments from 30 percent to 25 percent and then down to the present five percent, but it gets nothing back from Iraq; even repeated Kuwaiti efforts to propose joint ventures with Iraq go nowhere. Similarly, the GOK had agreed to work with Iraq to resolve issues related to the maritime boundary and other Khor Abd'ullah issues, but there had been no GOI response. The GOK remains deeply frustrated by GOI recalcitrance, he noted, and now urgently requires Iraq to prove its good faith on the crucial land border issue by removing its farmers and agreeing to border pillar maintenance; these are essential first steps to a better relationship. "Kuwait is ready to cooperate," he concluded, "but it has its red lines."

Other Areas for Amir-POTUS Discussion

16. (C) Turning to other issues that the Amir may raise with POTUS, Abulhassan suggested these could include the GOK's regional economic program as introduced at the January 2009 Arab Economic Summit, its four remaining Guantanamo detainees, concerns about Iran and continuing Kuwaiti frustration over delays in visa issuance, particularly for Kuwaiti students. (Note: Ambassador interjected at this point that the GOK was losing a good opportunity to engage on visa and related issues with Department of Homeland Security Secretary Napolitano, who was in Kuwait July 2, by failing to arrange a senior GOK meeting for her. End Note.) The Amir may also wish to explore expanded bilateral cooperation in the health field. Abulhassan noted that, while it is unlikely the Amir will raise the issue of Kuwait's Tier 3 TIP status, the GOK is not pleased with this finding. AA/S Feltman urged the GOK to seize the initiative on TIP and initiate a relationship with newly-appointed G/TIP Ambassador CdeBaca.

GOK Views on Events In Iran

17. (C) Noting that the USG has few insider insights into Iran and its politics, AA/S Feltman queried Abulhassan on the GOK's views regarding ongoing post-election violence there. Abulhassan, a Shia, commented that, in his view, the events have been exaggerated by the media but, in any event, the clerical regime in Tehran seeks to keep the Iranian population, "poor, ignorant, and devout" and, therefore, not inclined to question the leadership. He said he believed the present events have tarnished the regime only slightly and that the regime is unlikely to become significantly more accommodating to outside viewpoints anytime soon. The GOK's advice to the USG on engagement with Iran, he said, is simply to keep up the effort to establish a dialogue; no other options are available.

Comment

18. (C) The GOK's selection of its former UN ambassador and chief expert on Chapter VII to meet with AA/S Feltman is telling. If anything, Abulhassan represents Kuwait's hardline on these issues and so his suggestion that resolution of the 833 boundary demarcation will open doors to compromise on other issues, such as compensation and the maritime boundary, is promising.

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